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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 001059

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TAGS: PROP PREL KN KS
SUBJECT: KOREAN-AMERICAN ACADEMIC HEADS TO PYONGYANG TO
GIVE "COUNSEL"

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 1, Professor Han S. Park from the University of Georgia met with Pol M/C to brief us on his upcoming visit to Pyongyang. Park said that he had made frequent trips to the DPRK and had deep connections with its leaders and members of the Asia Pacific Peace Committee and the Foreign Ministry. Park relayed that the DPRK leadership had been disappointed by the Obama administration's lack of direct engagement. They also found the administration's insistence on North Korea's return to the Six-Party Talks (6PT) to be unacceptable. Park's view was that there was little or no likelihood for the DPRK to return to the 6PT; there had to be a completely new round of multilateral talks or just bilateral talks with the United States. Park also observed that the DPRK is currently being run with an agenda designed by and for the military and they would not deviate from their plans. He did not believe that the DPRK is practicing gamesmanship or testing boundaries with the missile launches and nuclear tests but that their actions were being driven by internal turmoil. The DPRK leadership was on a proscribed course and they intend to follow through. Park said he would also seek to meet with the two detained U.S. journalists; he would tell the North Korean authorities that nothing good could come from holding them longer. DPRK was looking for a way to resolve the situation but must "save face." Park said he would check in with post upon his return from Pyongyang, on or around July 10. End Summary.

Professor Park's Relationships

¶2. (C) Pol M/C on July 1 met with North Korea expert Han S. Park who teaches at the University of Georgia and also serves as the Director of the Center for the Study of Global Issues. A widely recognized authority on North Korea, with friendly relations with many North Korean cadres and leaders, Park contacted Pol M/C to brief us on the issues that he would raise during his upcoming trip, July 4-8, to Pyongyang. Park said that he had been to North Korea over 40 times and had deep, long-term relationships with people in the DPRK's Foreign Ministry and members of the Asia Pacific Peace Committee who also have influence with the leadership. Park specifically named Han Song-ryol, Li Gun and Kim Gye-kwan of the Foreign Ministry as persons with whom he had a close relationship. He also named Pak Ki-byun and Li Jyon-pyo of the Asia Pacific Peace Committee as close contacts. Park noted that Li Jyon-pyo in particular was very well connected with the leadership in Pyongyang, especially Kim Jong-il. Park said he would depart Seoul for Beijing on July 2 where he would obtain a visa to travel to Pyongyang, and leave Beijing on July 4, stay in the DPRK until July 8 then fly to Shenyang to meet with Chinese authorities. On July 9, Park plans to return to Seoul and requested a meeting with Emboffs.

Current Relations and Military Influence

¶3. (C) Park said that relations between the United States, ROK and DPRK were rapidly deteriorating, possibly the worst he had seen for some time. When asked why Pyongyang shut down talks when the new U.S. administration was ready to engage, Park said that Pyongyang alone was not responsible for the decision and that at the moment decisions in North Korea were made by and for the military. Park said the atmosphere in Pyongyang was initially hopeful that the new U.S. administration would directly engage the leadership and open a dialogue, but the USG made no move to engage and "acted like it didn't know what to do" with the DPRK for months. Still, Park said, Pyongyang had made a serious mistake in making premature judgments of the new U.S. administration, resulting in the missile launch and second nuclear test, but that the DPRK military was simply following a schedule that was laid out some time ago. Park characterized the military's thinking as one-track with no room for re-adjustment. In Park's estimation, many of Pyongyang's actions were dictated by their current domestic situation. Park did not believe that the DPRK was practicing gamesmanship in an attempt to bait the USG or test the ROK. The DPRK "does not have that kind of maneuvering room" and there was no margin for error. All of these actions were a "script designed by the military" and the leadership was carrying it out. The leadership in Pyongyang was more than capable of critical analysis and they realize their shortcomings, but it was impossible to express this through the chain of command. However, Park also characterized the regime as having a "kamikaze" mentality.

Succession, Deficiencies and the Legacy of Kim Il-sung

¶4. (C) On the issue of succession, Park said that Kim Jong-un was designated as the heir because of "clear deficiencies" in the other two sons who were too well known and have too much "baggage." According to Park, the succession would not be too turbulent and Kim Jong-un would not have much power. His position would be largely symbolic and he would be controlled by others in Pyongyang; the DPRK would move towards a more collective leadership.

¶5. (C) The true leader in North Korea remained Kim Il-sung, because the DPRK was still following his policies, thoughts and writings. Park called the regime a theocracy pointing out that official documents must measure the year in terms of Kim Il-sung's birth. For example, the year 2009 is considered Juche minus 3 because we are currently three years away from celebrating what would be the centenary of Kim Il-sung's birth.

Two AMCIT Journalists and 6PT

¶6. (C) Park mentioned that as the trial of the two AMCIT journalists was over, the situation was no longer in the hands of the military only; others may be able to influence the process. On this trip he would see what could be done now that the trial was over. The DPRK leadership was looking for a face saving way out of the dilemma.

¶7. (C) On the Six-Party Talks, Park believed that the DPRK would not return to the table. They never wanted to be a part of it and were lured in by the rewards and the boost in international image, but their attitude soured because promised benefits did not materialize. During the 6PT, Pyongyang also felt quite isolated and ganged up on by the five parties. Perhaps there could be "multilateral talks," but that must include a new structure or a new roster of member states. Above all, the North Koreans wanted bilateral talks with the United States.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: Professor Park has a long history of contacts with North Korea officials. Not surprisingly, Park can often appear more of an apologist for North Korea than an analyst. Still, we have found his views generally helpful in understanding North Korean thinking and motives. More than that, we hope that Park can convey some of his broader, more realistic perspectives he has acquired from living and teaching in Georgia over the past 40 years.

STEPHENNS